

Study Guide for the Australian Collaboration Fact and Issue Sheet

WELL-BEING AND HAPPINESS

FOR REVIEW

1. Happiness

1a. What are the two main ways of defining happiness? Describe in your own words what 'moral-laden' and 'moral-neutral' mean. Do you consider your own understanding of happiness to fall into either or both of these ways of thinking about it?

1b. Describe in your own words the differences between 'state' and 'trait' models of happiness.

1c. The Fact and Issue Sheet mentions several philosophical approaches to happiness provided by Alain de Botton. Jot these down on a diagram that shows their interconnections?

1d. Can you work out the meaning of 'utilitarianism' from the context? If not, look it up in a dictionary of philosophy such as the Stanford: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>

1e. What does the contemporary philosopher A.C. Grayling propose in place of the vague notion of 'happiness'.

2. Unhappiness

2a. Name one internal and one external cause of unhappiness. Can you think of a specific example for each cause?

2b. How many adults and how many young adults live with depression each year in Australia?

2c. Describe in your own words what the phrase 'to mask unhappiness' means.

3. Contemporary studies of happiness

3a. What is subjective well-being and why is it considered an important factor when measuring happiness?

3b. What three standard findings in happiness studies does Lord Richard Layard report?

3c. Do you know what the phrases 'comparative income' and 'absolute income' mean? Can you work it out from the context?

3d. Name one reason why focussing on accumulating material wealth does not necessarily lead to happiness.

3e. Does poverty affect subjective well-being?

3f. What are the two main sources of well-being according to Robert E. Lane?

3g. Is there much agreement among happiness studies?

4. Measuring happiness in Australia

4a. Describe the Human Development Index, including its three components.

4b. How does Australia rank in happiness studies?

4c. Consider the statistics in the Ipsos Mackay poll. Can you draw a diagram or quick chart to indicate these proportions?

5. Ways of increasing happiness

5a. Name five external situations that are known to contribute to happiness levels.

5b. Create a poster illustrating the four key strategies commonly advocated for achieving personal happiness. Include as many details as you can, thinking of your own examples as well as those in the Fact and Issue Sheet.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Question for a Think/Pair/Share activity:

Think through the following questions individually and jot down your answers. Is happiness something you can sense about a person from the outside? Who is the happiest person you know? What makes you think they are happy? Is it the way they behave? Or perhaps their facial expressions? Or their life circumstances? Or do they always seem to be in a good mood? Share your thoughts with a partner, and listen to their description of the happiest person they know. What does the rest of your class think? Can you describe as a class some of the general characteristics of people who seem happy?

2. Question for individual thought and then class discussion:

What do you think of Lord Richard Layard's 'Big Seven' of happiness? Give yourself a score out of ten for each of the seven factors. Was there anything surprising for you in your scores? Does your overall score reflect your general sense of your 'happiness level'? As the class, discuss the merits of the 'Big Seven' model. Is it adequate? Are there any extra factors that should be included?

3. Topic for class debate:

Look at the section on unhappiness in the Fact and Issue Sheet. Psychologist Martin Seligman claims that the high incidence of unhappiness in our society is attributable to 'rampant individualism'. Do you agree with this assessment? Why? Why not?

FOR RESEARCH

1. Do some further research on the multi-billion dollar 'well-being industry'. Focus on the genre of 'self-help' books. Go to the largest bookshop you have access to, and browse the 'self-help' section of the shop. What are your impressions? What are the authors promising to give their readers? How is 'happiness' marketed in this context? Are there any books that you think might be genuinely useful to someone seeking to increase their happiness levels? Are there any books that appeal to you? Why or why not? If you don't have access to a good bookshop, you could look at an online bookshop such as Amazon. This article might offer a useful perspective:

<http://www.newstatesman.com/200409060004>

2. Many of the authors in the Fact and Issue Sheet cite material wealth as an important factor in happiness and wellbeing. And yet many people in wealthy countries suffer from depression. Research the commonly held belief that depression is a 'rich person's illness'. Is this notion backed up by contemporary research? Conduct web searches on the relationship between wealth and mental health to see what you can find. Below are some articles, both academic and journalistic, to get you started:

<http://www.biopsychiatry.com/happiness/happygene.html>

http://www.coa.gov.ph/gad/articles/depression_062006.htm

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/31/AR2006073100643.html>

3. Familiarise yourself with the Australian Unity Well-being Index, which is mentioned in the Fact and Issue Sheet. This kind of statistical analysis can be daunting but try to penetrate the format of such reports to see what can be discovered. Begin by choosing a report with a sub-heading that interests you, such as 'Owning a pet' or 'Impact of the impending Iraq War'. Do a poster project to find a means of communicating the crux of the information to your class. You could use the idea of a government 'health and wellbeing' campaign as a model. How might you target a particular community sector to promote an aspect of happiness or well-being?

http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/acqol/index_wellbeing/index.htm